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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by Catholics for Choice, the Center for Health and Gender Equity, Inc., the Girls' Power Initiative, the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the International Alliance of Women, Ipas and Population Action International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

1. In 2010 the Economic and Social Council will review implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and how it can contribute to meeting the Millennium Development Goals. We would like to offer the following points for consideration in the panel discussions and plenary sessions, focusing on four issues of great importance: managing the consequences of sexual violence against women and girls; broadening the involvement of men in reproductive health; enabling women to exercise their reproductive rights; and linking or integrating various aspects of reproductive health.

A. Managing the consequences of sexual violence against women and girls

2. In its resolution 1820 (2008), the Security Council called on Governments to debunk myths that fuel sexual violence and to take measures to particularly eliminate sexual violence against women and girls in conflict situations. This was reiterated in Council resolution 1888 (2009).

3. Paragraphs 124 (g) and 125 (a) of the Beijing Platform for Action not only address sexual violence in conflict situations but also in daily life and call for the development of strategies to ensure that women who survive violence are not revictimized because of gender-insensitive laws or judicial or enforcement practices and for the provision of medical, psychological and legal services to help them cope with the consequences of violence.

4. In addition to measures to eradicate sexual and domestic violence, we call for enhanced efforts to effectively implement programmes and interventions to help women and girls who become victims and survivors of domestic and sexual abuse deal with the physical and emotional consequences. This would include provision of prompt treatment of physical and emotional trauma, emergency contraception, safe abortion care, post-exposure prophylaxis of HIV infection, screening and treatment of sexually transmitted infections and socio-legal assistance where women wish to press charges or leave abusive living conditions.

B. Broadening the involvement of men in reproductive health

5. The Platform for Action (see paras. 107 (e) and 109 (l)) calls for programmes to enable men of all ages to effectively take responsibility for promotion of gender equality, responsible sexual and reproductive behaviour, including prevention of sexually transmitted infections and condom use, parental responsibility, and the elimination of violence against women in both public and private life.

6. Growing numbers of groups of men against violence and for gender equity are doing great work to promote gender sensitivity and gender equity. However, the topics of rape-related pregnancy, other unwanted pregnancies and reproductive choice are still not broadly broached in their publications and campaigns.

7. We urge the members of these groups, and men everywhere, to take responsibility for reproductive rights as a men's issue by actively promoting and supporting both safe motherhood and women's access to emergency contraception and safe abortion. Furthermore, when it comes to HIV, sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy prevention, we urge men to share equal responsibility for

partner communication, negotiation and correct use of male and female condoms, the only dual-protection technologies that are available today.

C. Enabling women to exercise their reproductive and sexual rights

8. The Platform for Action (para. 106 (k)) states that prevention of unwanted pregnancies must always be given the highest priority and that women should have access to post-abortion care and safe abortions as permitted by law. It also says that States should consider reviewing laws containing punitive measures against women who have undergone illegal abortions. Over 400 legislators and ministers at the Fourth Global Parliamentarians' Conference on Population and Development, held in October 2009, reiterated this statement and also called for a review of "all laws and practices that still restrict access to sexual and reproductive health services".

9. We call on Governments, multilateral organizations, donor agencies and civil society groups to incorporate full reproductive rights, including access to safe legal abortions, into their advocacy for women's rights.

10. The Platform for Action (para. 83 (k)) also requests Governments to "remove legal and regulatory and social barriers, where appropriate, to sexual and reproductive health education within formal education regarding women's health issues". In addition, it reiterates that reproductive health "also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations" (see para. 9). Accordingly, we ask the aforementioned groups to include education on sexual rights into their programmes of sexual and reproductive health education. This will further help fulfil the need identified in paragraph 95 to meet "the educational and service needs of adolescents to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality".

D. Linking or integrating various aspects of reproductive health

11. The Platform for Action (para. 106 (c)) emphasizes a need to design and implement, in cooperation with women and community-based organizations, gender-sensitive health programmes that address women's needs throughout their lives, taking into account their multiple roles and responsibilities and demands on their time.

12. The above recommendation was supported by the Fourth Parliamentarians' Conference, which called for the full integration of a basic and affordable package of sexual and reproductive health services and information in community-based facilities, including services for family planning, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, reproductive tract infections, cervical and breast cancer screening and prevention and maternal and newborn and child health.

13. Some multilateral and civil society organizations are working on aspects of such linkages and integration. We urge more groups to do so and to incorporate aspects of reproductive health that are often left aside into such programmes, for example emergency contraception, safe abortion care, woman-initiated HIV prevention, including female condoms and the genital human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination.